

NOTES ON THEME 1 – PRESSURE / FEELING TRAPPED

QUESTIONS TO GET YOU THINKING:

- How do YOU respond to pressures such as: school, parents, family, friends? Do you give in to them? Run away? Remain aloof and hide your true feelings? Fight? Rebel?
- What does the way you respond to pressure tell you about your personality?
- Applying this to the film, what can we learn about Gilbert's character by the way he responds to pressure?
- How does the film's title suggest this?

HOW IS GILBERT 'UNDER PRESSURE' IN THIS FILM? WHAT IS 'EATING' HIM?

- He's the head of the family now that Dad has died and Larry has left. At the beginning of the film we see a close-up on a picture of Larry in a graduation cap which suggests he went onto bigger and better things. Gilbert, however, is still stuck in the small town of Endora, providing for his family.
- As stated, he's the breadwinner for his family – Ellen works at Dairy Dreme and Amy seems to look after the house.
- On top of this, he is also responsible for looking after his almost 18 year old brother Arnie who is mentally retarded / developmentally delayed. This is not an easy task, as Arnie often runs off and climbs the water tower, a huge structure in the centre of town.
- Townsfolk often comment that he is like his father (his boss: "I could swear I was looking at your father")

HOW DOES GILBERT COPE WITH THIS PRESSURE?

- He often tries to escape situations he finds uncomfortable, shown by dialogue "I gotta go", an indication of the fact that he is often trying to run from things.
- He first says this when Betty Carver is seducing him. He doesn't want to carry on their affair but does not know how to end it in any other way. He uses the excuse of her husband wanting to talk to him and disappears.
- He later says this when Becky tells him she is leaving. He is obviously upset at this news, but after he drops her home he refuses to talk about it and simply says "I gotta go", leaving Becky upset and all alone.
- He says this for the last time after he has hit Arnie and finds himself at Becky's camping spot. He is choking over his words and disgusted with himself, but tries to escape this feeling by stating "I gotta go" once again. What is interesting this time is that he paces for a while and then stops, not moving anywhere. Becky pulls him into her arms and he confesses "I got nowhere to go" – the ultimate acknowledgement of his feeling trapped.
- Gilbert is not used to thinking about himself and is used to putting others first. This must come with an immense amount of pressure to be 'good enough; both women in his life pick up on this in the following dialogue:

Becky: "Tell me what you want as fast as it comes to you"

Gilbert: "I want... mama to take aerobics classes. Ellen to grow up. A new brain for Arnie..."

Becky: "But what do you want for you?"

Gilbert: "I want to be a good person"

EVEN WHEN QUESTIONED, GILBERT CANNOT THINK OF ANYTHING HE WANTS FOR HIMSELF OTHER THAN TO BE A GOOD PERSON FOR OTHERS! THIS IS SIGNIFICANT.

Betty Carver: "Poor Gilbert, cooped up, taking care of everybody else, forgetting all about you"

- Because Gilbert cannot express his feelings, they get bottled up to the point where he erupts and hits the one he cares for the most. He feels extremely guilt afterwards and is talked around by Becky.

WHAT HELPS TO RESOLVE THIS PRESSURE?

- Becky is a 'catalyst for change' in Gilbert. She encourages him to do things for himself as well as for others. She won't allow him to say sorry for Artie dropping her groceries. She tells him "I'm not sorry" and insists it is not a big deal.
- She helps Gilbert appreciate the simple pleasures in life. She also introduces him to the pleasures of watching the sunset and asks him what there is to do in Endora. When he can't think of anything, she won't take no for an answer and they end up eating ice-cream together.
- Momma's death, although tragic, does result in the pressure on Gilbert lessening. Suddenly he is not tied to his house anymore. Compare these 2 quotes to each other to gauge the change in Gilbert's character.

(start of film) "We're not going anywhere, Gilbert" (Arnie to Gilbert when G puts him to bed)
"We can go anywhere, if we want" (G to Arnie as they wait for Becky to pick them up).

TECHNIQUES

- Narration allows us to enter the mind of Gilbert. The way he says certain things allows us intimate access to his thoughts and personality, e.g: "Living in Endora is like dancing to no music"
- Camera techniques – low angle shot looking up at Gilbert at end of film after he has shrugged off previous pressure. Two-shot of Arnie and him as they prepare to enter their new life.
- Dialogue – choose your quotes from the many we have discussed.
- Lighting – dark lighting around Gilbert (before hitting Arnie and in car as he leave Endora momentarily) suggest pressure / a symbolic shadow over him
- Use of colour / close-up on red balloon as he blows it up so much it bursts – this is a symbol of the frustration inside Gilbert.